

The Character of Scripture—and of Its Best Interpreters

“Now after the death of Moses . . . the Lord spake unto Joshua the son of Nun, Moses’ minister, saying, Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them . . . be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.” Joshua 1:1-8

“Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.” Psalm 1:1-3

“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.” Psalm 119:105

“He that is of God heareth God’s words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God.” John 8:47

“Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. . . . But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.” 1 Corinthians 2:9-16

“For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” 2 Peter 1:21

Edwards believed deep in his bones that the Bible was divine. He also judged, correlatively, that the people best equipped to understand its scope and teachings and interpret them for others were the ones with “the mind of Christ,” those inhabited by the very same Holy Spirit of God who first inspired the biblical writers, now unites believers to Christ--the eternal Word of God--and helps the humble, holy Christian plumb “the deep things of God” by

illuminating her exegetical efforts. Edwards knew that some in his day thought the Bible should be handled much as any other book, without presumption of divinity in text or exegete. We observed in chapter one that he perused such writers avidly, using the work of many he assumed were “natural men” to interpret holy writ. Still, with most other Christians since the time of the apostles, he thought that they were wrong about the nature of the Bible and, thus, the best way to understand its meanings. Before we look at Edwards’ exegetical method in detail, then, we need to spend some time on his account of Scripture itself, his view that Spirit-filled believers had a cognitive advantage when it came to biblical learning, and the tension this created as he sought to use the Bible in a credibly modern way.

“The Emanation of His Glory”

Edwards often spoke of Scripture as the very “Word of God,” an “Emanation of his Glory.” Not surprisingly, considering his doctrine of the Trinity, he also wrote of Scripture as the precious “word of Christ,” or “the epistle of Christ that he has written to us.” The Bible bears “the voice of God” to us by virtue of the Spirit. It evokes in us “a strange and unaccountable kind of enchantment.” God caters to our weakness when He speaks to us in Scripture. He condescends to finitude, accommodating ignorance--but *speaks* nonetheless, for His glory and our good. Thus the Bible is “a perfect rule” and “guide to true happiness.” It functions, when appropriated in faith and earnest practice, as an essential “word of life,” a “sweet, . . . life-giving word.”¹

Edwards held what will seem today an especially high view of the Bible’s inspiration, quite common though it was among the Christians in his world. He taught that God “indited” the Scriptures (i.e. proclaimed, pronounced, or composed them) through the Bible’s human authors and thus “dictated” to ministers the things they are to preach.² He followed Mastricht’s reading

of 2 Timothy 3:16 (“All scripture is given by inspiration of God,” etc.), which was rather commonplace.³ He quoted Owen on the manner in which the canon was inspired (in a note on the pattern of the Temple given to David):

The Spirit of God acted and guided the prophets “as to the very organs of their bodies, whereby they expressed the revelation which they had received by inspiration from him. They spake as they were acted by the Holy Ghost [2 Peter 1:21]. . . . So when David had received the pattern of the temple, and the manner of the whole worship of God therein by the Spirit, he says, ‘All this the Lord made me understand in writing by his hand upon me, even all the work of this pattern’ [I Chronicles 28:19]. The Spirit of God not only revealed it unto him, but so guided him in writing of it down, as that he might understand the mind of God out of what himself had written; or he gave it him so plainly and evidently, as if every particular had been expressed in writing by the finger of God.”⁴

Many other Reformed writers had a similar view of the matter.⁵ All allowed that God inspired different genres differently, using multiple human authors in a variety of settings with a diversity of pedigrees, temperaments, and styles. In the words of William Ames, used by Edwards while at Yale,

divine inspiration was present among those [biblical] writers in different ways. Some things were altogether unknown to the writer in advance, as appears in the history of past creation, or in the foretelling of things to come. But some things were previously known to the writer, as appears in the history of Christ written by the apostles. Some things were known by a natural knowledge and some by a supernatural. In those things that were hidden and unknown, divine inspiration

was at work by itself. In those things which were known, or where the knowledge was obtained by ordinary means, there was added the writers' devout zeal so that (God assisting them) they might not err in writing.⁶

These Reformed theologians rarely verged on a passive view of Scriptural dictation, as if God had dropped the Bible from the blue on golden plates. But neither did they focus on the personal contributions of the Bible's human authors to the degree that most late-modern biblical scholars would. In the main they taught, in Edwards' words, that God chose His penmen, gave them ears to hear Him speaking and "extraordinary gifts" for relaying His Word to others, and revealed in and through them "an infallible rule of faith and works and manners to the church," a "sure rule which if we follow we cannot err."⁷

"The Gospel . . . Don't Go Abroad a Begging for Its Evidence"

As one would assume given his lofty view of biblical inspiration, Edwards sided with thinkers like Calvin who said that Scripture is self-authenticated (αὐτόπιστον), full of inherent proof of its divine source and power.⁸ He affirmed the famed defense of the Puritans' "plaine translation" of the Psalter in the Massachusetts *Bay Psalm Book* (1640): "Gods Altar needs not our pollishings." He said as much himself scores of times throughout his life. For as he put the matter briefly in his book, *Religious Affections* (1746), "The gospel of the blessed God don't go abroad a begging for its evidence, so much as some think; it has its highest and most proper evidence in itself."⁹

He attributed the faith of true believers in the Word to what he called "intrinsic signatures of divinity" within it. "They see that excellency and . . . image of God in the Word," he attested, "that constrains the mind to assent to it and embrace it as true and divine." Or morphing sensory

metaphors, the Lord's people "hear God speak" amid the pages of the Bible. They recognize His voice. To them, "he speaks like a God. His speech is . . . excellent, holy, wise, awful and gracious," Edwards claimed. He compared this recognition of the voice of God in Scripture to the glimpse that Peter got of Jesus' glory in the gospels on the Mount of Transfiguration. "Peter, when he saw this, his mind was strongly carried to believe, and he was sure that Christ was a divine and holy person without sitting down to reason about it; he was convinced and assured at once irresistibly, and was as it were intuitively certain." Likewise, saints sense the presence and glory of God within His Word. It is a "lamp" that shines a heavenly light of glory round about them. Or as Jeremiah prophesied so many years ago (Jeremiah 23:29), it is a "fire" and a "hammer" that "dissolves the Rocky Hearts of the chil[dren] of men."¹⁰

In keeping with tradition, Edwards touted both "external" and "internal" proofs for the Bible's credibility. "God is not wont to speak to men," he told his flock, without providing us "sufficient means to know" that He is speaking. "He has given the world great evidence that [Scripture] . . . is his word. [Both] external [and] internal" evidence abounds. There are "all the kinds of evidence" for Scripture, he averred, "it is possible a revelation should have: there are all kinds of internal evidences from the majesty, holiness, sublimity, harmony, etc.; and there are all kinds of external evidences, prophecy and miracles" confirmed outside the canon. Nevertheless, he deemed the Bible's inner testimony best for most people. Scripture is for all, he taught, and laity have little time to trudge through the evidence that lies beyond its bounds. Most are simply "not capable of any certain or effectual conviction of the divine authority of the Scriptures, by such arguments as learned men make use of," he advised. Common people need the Spirit's help discerning the Word of God—and this is part of what He grants to those who turn to Him in faith. "The child of God doth . . . see and feel the truth of divine things," he said. The saints "can

feel such a power and kind of omnipotency in Christianity, and taste such a sweetness, and see such wisdom, such an excellent harmony in the gospel, as carry their own light with them, and powerfully do enforce and conquer the assent and necessitates their minds to receive it as proceeding from God, and as the certain truth.”¹¹

Whether or not we taste this sweetness, see this wisdom and believe, Edwards taught that Holy Scripture always wins its way in the world, ever glorifies the Lord by vindicating truth and justice. “God’s word always comes as [a] conqueror,” he claimed: “those . . . not conquered by conversion shall be conquered by destruction and the execution of its threatenings.” He cautioned congregations in this manner time and again, threatening everyone who listened with the power of the Word—and giving enemies a reason to call him obstinate and proud. While still in his late-twenties he forewarned his wary flock, “When God sends his messengers to preach his word, his word shall not be in vain . . . God will obtain his end, let men treat his word how they will.” Three years later he reminded them, if Scripture “don’t profit [you] it shall hurt. It will be either food or poison. It shall not return . . . void.” Shortly after George Whitefield swept through town the first time (October 1740), bringing the Great Awakening with him, Edwards tried to get his people to improve on what they heard. “The word of God will take hold of all that hear it,” he assured them, whether in “one way or another. . . . Every part of the message that God sends shall be effectual.” To “the elect,” Word and Spirit yield “eternal salvation, [to] reprobates, everlasting condemnation.”¹²

“They Tremble at God’s Word”

Thus, “truly religious persons,” those who appreciate the power and authority of Scripture, often “tremble at God’s word.” They find it “piercing, awful, and tremendous,”

Edwards noted, and their hearts melt before it. “The word in its powerful efficacy,” in mortifying sin and converting people to Christ, “does . . . cut the soul asunder.” So at Psalm 29:3 (“the God of glory thundereth”), Edwards wrote in the “Blank Bible”: “Lightning and thunder is a very lively image of the word of God ‘Tis exceeding quick, and exceeding piercing, and powerful to break in pieces, and scorch, and dissolve, and is full of majesty.” As he put this to his congregation in 1749, the “Hammer of the Law subdues the Heart with . . . Compulsion. [B]ut the fire of the Gospel sweetly subdues. . . . [It] kindles that Holy Flame in the soul that never shall go out.”¹³

Trembling at the Word, that is, could stem from both fear and sweet delight in the things of God. And while the former cause prevailed among the anxious and oppressed, the latter shot adrenaline through the saints. Edwards explained, revelation “is a sweet sort of knowledge” to the Christian. “He loves to view and behold the things of . . . God; they are to him the most pleasing and beautiful objects in the world. He can never satisfy his eyes with looking on them, because he beholds them as certain truths and as things of all the most excellent.” Scripture is sublime to him. He cannot get his fill. Because as Edwards preached at Yale at the apex of the Awakening, when God is at work in the world He effects esteem for the Word. In an effort to help students identify the work of God amid the fervor of revival and distinguish it from Satan’s counterfeit spirituality, Edwards encouraged listeners to ground spiritual passion on the contents of the Bible. “That spirit that operates in such a manner, as to cause in men a greater regard to the Holy Scriptures, and establishes them more in their truth and divinity, is certainly the Spirit of God,” he assured them.¹⁴

Preachers should do all they can, in Edwards’ estimation, to arouse godly tremors in the saints. To be sure, “the impressing divine things on the hearts and affections of men” is one of

the main reasons God ordained the preaching of the Word. “And therefore,” Edwards reasoned, “it don’t answer [that] aim . . . merely for men to have good commentaries . . . and other good books of divinity.” While these may provide “a good doctrinal or speculative understanding” of the Bible, “yet they have not an equal tendency to impress [it] on men’s hearts and affections.” Edwards granted that recalling “what was heard in a sermon is oftentimes very profitable,” but claimed that “for the most part, remembrance is from an impression the words made on the heart,” and that “memory profits” people insofar “as it renews and increases that impression.” Thus ministers should not shy away from poignant preaching. It is better for their people than the reading of good books. And it conveys a better feeling for the great things of God “than a moderate, dull, indifferent way of speaking.”

An appearance of affection and earnestness in the manner of delivery, if it be very great indeed, yet if it be agreeable to the nature of the subject, and ben’t beyond a proportion to its importance and worthiness of affection, and there be no appearance of its being feigned or forced, has so much the greater tendency to beget true ideas or apprehensions in the minds of the hearers, of the subject spoken of, and so to enlighten the understanding. . . . I should think myself in the way of my duty to raise the affections of my hearers as high as possibly I can, provided that they are affected with nothing but truth, and with affections that are not disagreeable to the nature of what they are affected with.

Cognition is deficient when it comes to holy writ. Until the Word descends deep into the heart of the believer, bearing the passion fruit of love, it will not be understood. “Was there ever an age wherein strength and penetration of reason, extent of learning, exactness of distinction, correctness of style, and clearness of expression, did so abound?,” Edwards queried his

enlightened, modern readers. “And yet was there ever an age wherein there has been so little sense of the evil of sin, so little love to God, heavenly-mindedness, and holiness of life, among the professors of the true religion? Our people don’t so much need to have their heads stored, as to have their hearts touched,” he concluded famously, “and they stand in the greatest need of that sort of preaching that has the greatest tendency to do this.”¹⁵

Edwards testified frequently that Word and Spirit do in fact enthrall the twice born. “Persons after their conversion often speak of things of religion as seeming new to them,” he noted in his *Faithful Narrative*. “It seems to them they never heard preaching before; that the Bible is a new book: they find there new chapters, new psalms, new histories, because they see them in a new light.” He alleged, furthermore, that “all true Christians” have a “conviction of the . . . the things of the gospel.” And he offered several examples in his writings on revival and regenerate spirituality. His own zeal for Scripture blossomed after his conversion (as we saw in chapter one). His congregation felt a yearning for the Bible as revival blazed in 1735: “While God was so remarkably present amongst us by his Spirit, there was no book so delighted in as the Bible,” Edwards wrote. He recounted to a clergy friend in Boston, Benjamin Colman, during the same season of grace, “Their esteem of the holy Scriptures is exceedingly increased. . . . There have been some instances of persons that by only an accidental sight of the Bible, have been as much moved . . . as a lover by the sight of his sweetheart.” Further, his encomium to David Brainerd’s passion for the Bible stood for decades as a standard of Edwardsean biblicism. Five days before he died, Brainerd lay in bed in Edwards’ house, girding himself for glory. “In the evening, as one came into the room with a Bible in her hand, he expressed himself thus; ‘Oh, that dear book! that lovely book! I shall soon see it opened! The mysteries that are in it, and the mysteries of God’s Providence, will be all unfolded!’”¹⁶

“Had It Not Been for Revelation”

Edwards taught that sacred Scripture was essential to our flourishing, even in public life. He accentuated the need for both reason and revelation, for knowing both “what reason and Scripture declare” on things that matter most.¹⁷ He thought the “doctrines of Christianity” themselves “most rational, exceeding congruous to . . . natural reason.”¹⁸ Moreover, he affirmed the Catholic dictum that to understand the world and its relationship to God we need the “book of nature” and the “book of Scripture.” However, he prioritized the Bible over other sources of knowledge. As he argued in *Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God* (1741), “all that is visible to the eye is unintelligible and vain, without the Word of God to instruct and guide the mind.” And as he preached in a sermon on this theme a few years earlier,

We make a distinction between the things that we know by reason, and things we know by revelation. But alas we scarce know what we say: we know not what we should have known . . . had it not been for revelation Many of the principles of morality and religion that we have always been brought up in the knowledge of, appear so rational that we are ready to think we could have found ‘em out by our own natural reason [But] all the learning, yea, all the common civility that there is in the world, seems to be either directly or indirectly from revelation, whether men are sensible of it or no. . . . Everything that is good and useful in this fallen world, is from supernatural help.¹⁹

This became a central theme in his response to English deists. In opposition to their call for a religion of nature and reason, Edwards insisted on the need of supernatural revelation--even for the maintenance of a healthy civic virtue. We have seen that he believed that God has spoken

in the Bible. It is “unreasonable,” in fact, he said, “to suppose that . . . there should be a God, an intelligent voluntary being, that has so much concern with [us], and with whom we have infinitely more concern than with any other being, and yet that he should never speak.” Further, if God has really divulged Himself in writing in the Bible, we should honor holy Scripture as “the fountain whence all knowledge in divinity must be derived.”²⁰ We should also grant it pride of place in secular conversation on the world and our place within it--topics treated by the deists and other non-traditional thinkers under “natural religion.” Edwards argued in his “Miscellanies” in 1728, “were it not for divine revelation, I am persuaded that there is no one doctrine of that which we call natural religion [but] would, notwithstanding all philosophy and learning, forever be involved in darkness, doubts, endless disputes and dreadful confusion.” He repeated this conviction in his notes on the “Importance of Doctrines & of Mysteries in Religion.” Many moderns “deceive themselves thro’ the Ambiguity or Equivocal use of the word REASON,” he wrote. “They argue as tho we must make our Reason the highest Rule to Judge of all things[,] even the doctrines of Revelation.” But “this way of Rejecting every thing but what we can first see for agreeable to our Reason Tends by degrees to bring every Thing relating not only to revealed Religion but even natural Religion into doubt[,] to make all appear with Dim Evidence like a shadow or the Ideas of a Dream till they are all neglected as worthy of no Regard.” He also preached about this notion to the people of Northampton in a sermon later printed on the history of redemption. Our reason tells us much about the work of God in the world, he said, but “nothing else . . . informs us what [the] scheme and design of God in his works is but only the holy Scriptures.”²¹

Supernatural revelation and the spiritual light it offered were, for Edwards, essential for clarifying the nature of reality. It was not that the world could not be known without the Bible, or

that Scripture was a textbook in history or natural science. Rather, for Edwards, Word and Spirit shone a light on worldly wisdom, rendering knowledge more real, sure, even beautiful than before. In a remarkable notebook entry dating from 1729, he depicted this so vividly that I quote him here at length:

A mind not spiritually enlightened [by means of the Bible and God's Spirit] beholds spiritual things faintly, like fainting, fading shadows that make no lively impression on his mind, like a man that beholds the trees and things abroad in the night: the ideas ben't strong and lively, and [are] very faint; and therefore he has but a little notion of the beauty of the face of the earth. But when the light comes to shine upon them, then the ideas appear with strength and distinctness; and he has that sense of the beauty of the trees and fields given him in a moment, which he would not have obtained by going about amongst them in the dark in a long time. A man that sets himself to reason without divine light is like a man that goes into the dark into a garden full of the most beautiful plants, and most artfully ordered, and compares things together by going from one thing to another, to feel of them and to measure the distances; but he that sees by divine light is like a man that views the garden when the sun shines upon it. There is . . . a light cast upon the ideas of spiritual things in the mind of the believer, which makes them appear clear and real, which before were but faint, obscure representations.²²

Edwards said as much in churches dozens of times throughout his life, heralding special revelation and the clarity it yielded as a brilliant, heavenly light, which illuminated for saints a world more vivid, polydimensional, and brimming with vitality than anything they had ever known before. He told his people revelation works “in the hearts of those” who “truly entertain

it” like “a light that shines in a dark place.” The “spiritual understanding” it provided, furthermore, was “like a gleam of light that breaks in upon the soul through a gloomy darkness. Of all the similitudes,” in fact, employed in Scripture “to describe to us this spiritual understanding, light is that which doth most fully represent it and is oftenest used.”²³

Edwards drafted scores of pages on this “supernatural light,” as well as its role in the production of a “spiritual understanding,” stating that spiritual light from Scripture constitutes a greater blessing “than any other privilege that ever God bestowed.” Readers who receive this light and keep it “bring forth Christ” in their hearts; Christ is truly “formed in them”; they are bonded through the Word with the living Word of God; and this union is “more blessed” than “to have Christ” within one’s “arms, or at the breast, as the virgin Mary had.” Spiritual knowledge even grants what Edwards spoke of in a sermon as “an earnest” or “the dawnings” of the beatific vision. It enables the people of God to share in the very life of God (2 Peter 1:4). For the assistance in the souls of those who have this special blessing “is not only from the Spirit, but it also partakes of the nature of that Spirit.”²⁴

“Spiritual Understanding . . . Denied to the Unregenerate”

The best posture for disciples who would understand the Bible, argued Edwards, was “to sit at Jesus’ feet.” That is to say, they should “go to him whose Word it is and beg of him to teach,” for “he has reserved to himself this work of enlightening the mind with spiritual knowledge, and there is no other can do it; there is none teaches like God.” With Mary of Bethany in the gospels, the sister of Lazarus and Martha—who took “a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair” (John 12:3)--they should be careful not to distract themselves with “[trouble] about many things.”

Rather, as Jesus said to Martha, only “one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part” (Luke 10:41-42), for she had clung to Christ and hung on His every word. Similarly, we should cling to every word that comes from the mouth of God, for “the word of God is the great means of our eternal good. . . . ‘tis the most necessary means, and without which our souls must famish.” It is like “MILK,” Edwards mused, flowing “from the breasts of the church.” It is like “rain” for which God’s people have “a great and earnest thirsting.”²⁵

Those who avoid this humble posture never really understand the true spirit of the Bible. Unconverted, proud people miss the Spirit’s main points. As Edwards cautioned in a talk on Jeremiah 8:8 (“the pen of the scribes is in vain”), “The Bible is all in vain to Them That continue in sin.” Or as he said when treating passages like 1 Corinthians 2 and the parable of the sower, “There is a spiritual understanding of divine things, which all natural and unregenerate men are destitute of.”

Natural men and hypocrites may boast of an extensive understanding, and may have natural abilities in a much greater strength than a godly man, and may abound in acquired knowledge, and may be able to reason with great strength about the holy Scriptures and the doctrines of religion; but yet he [*sic*] does not, nor can he, understand the Word of God. . . . Ungodly men are so far from understanding the Word of God, that those things that are the main things of revelation, the principal things of the gospel and what are the very quintessence and end of all, are what they have no notion at all of and which the godly only apprehend; as particularly, such things as these: the glory of God, the excellency and fullness of Jesus Christ, the nature of holiness, the reason and foundation of duty. These things are the very main things of the Scripture. They are the greatest

doctrines of God's Word, and they are the very end of revelation and its life and soul; and yet they are such as natural men have no idea or apprehension of.

Edwards granted that God lavished "common grace" and "illuminations" on the unconverted scholar. But He gave the Holy Spirit to the godly reader of Scripture and thus tendered her a cognitive advantage. A regenerate person "sees things in a new appearance, in quite another view, than ever he saw before: . . . he sees the wonderfulness of God's designs and a harmony in all his ways, a harmony, excellency and wondrousness in his Word: he sees these things by an eye of faith, and by a new light that was never before let into his mind." Further, "spiritual knowledge" grows by the "practice of virtue and holiness," a practice not pursued by those too proud to serve the Lord. "For we cannot have the idea [of anything in the mind, whether physical or spiritual] without the adapted disposition of mind, and the more suitable the disposition the more clear and intense the idea; but the more we practice, the more is the disposition increased" (more on this latter theme below).²⁶

Others had said as much before, though not always with the same psychological apparatus. Such epistemological claims date from the age of the ancient church and had been echoed in Edwards' favorite, early modern Protestant sources.²⁷ Even the Westminster divines confessed "the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word."²⁸ But after the rise of higher criticism, especially after Spinoza's opposition to the notion that the Spirit gave believers needed help interpreting Scripture,²⁹ Edwards felt a burden to proclaim this doctrine boldly and he did so with greater specificity than most. "The believer" has "such a sight and such a knowledge of things that, ever since, he is . . . another man," Edwards told his congregation. "The knowledge that he has is so substantial, so inward, and so affecting, that it has quite transformed the soul and

... changed his ... innermost principles.” Twenty years later he repeated this assertion in his opus on the *Affections*: “a spiritual taste of soul, mightily helps the soul, in its reasonings on the Word of God, and in judging of the true meaning of its rules; as it removes the prejudices of a depraved appetite, and naturally leads the thoughts in the right channel, casts a light on the Word of God, and causes the true meaning, most naturally to come to mind.”³⁰

Edwards gleaned from Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (7th ed., 1716) to explain this cognitive change—or at least he made use of idealist understandings of the way we come to know things and combined them with the language of sensationalist psychology. (He was neither a strict empiricist nor a thoroughgoing rationalist and, though he read the *Essay*, he did not usually cite it when developing this theme.)³¹ As he argued in the *Affections*, “the passing of a right judgment on things, depends on an having a right apprehension or idea of things” in the mind; and, regrettably, unconverted sinners lack a “sense” of divine things. He expanded on this notion in his “Miscellanies” notebooks: “sinners must be destitute even of the ideas of many spiritual and heavenly things and of divine excellencies, because they don’t experience them. It’s impossible for them so much as to have the idea of faith, trust in God, holy resignation, divine love, Christian charity; because their mind is not possessed of those things.” Edwards believed that this was “why the things of the gospel seem ... so tasteless and insipid to the natural man. They are a parcel of words to which they in their own minds have no correspondent ideas; ‘tis like a strange language or a dead letter, that is, sounds and letters without any signification.” And he preached about this doctrine using Locke’s famed description of direct and reflex knowledge:

There is a direct knowledge, and there is a reflex knowledge. The direct knowledge is the knowledge the Christian hath of divine things, without himself, of the truth and excellency of the things of the gospel. The reflex knowledge is

that which he obtains by reflecting and looking inward upon his own heart, and seeing the operations and actings of that, and the workings of the Spirit of God therein. By this reflection, the Christian obtains to know what regeneration is; and what are those actings of the Spirit of God which are so frequently spoken of in Scripture; and the whole applicatory part of religion, which is one half of divinity, and which every natural man is ignorant of.

Word and Spirit leave no mark upon the unconverted mind. The “natural man” may attain extensive knowledge of the Bible--its ancient Near Eastern backgrounds, its writers and their languages--but not the spiritual data it describes.³²

“A Notional Knowledge of Divine Things, Must Go before a Spiritual”

Even the saints, though, must work to understand the Bible rightly. Their regenerate disposition rarely obviates the need for careful study of the canon. “We must be much in reading the Scriptures,” Edwards urged his people often, “if we would get spiritual . . . knowledge.” We “must be pretty well versed in the Scripture[s], before [we] can see their scope and drift, their connection, harmony and agreement,” he explained. “A notional knowledge of divine things, must go before a spiritual.” For intimacy with God comes from time spent in reading the Bible, meditation, and prayer, not just superficial spiritual trysts or rapturous affairs. As Edwards liked to say to businesspeople living in his parish, God “gives us the gold” in providing us with Scripture but bequeaths it “in a mine that we might dig for it and get it in a way of our own industry.” This deepens our desire for it and draws us near to Him. If biblical treasure were “thrown plentifully before every man’s face, and everyone could have it without any labor or industry, it would not be prized as it now is.”³³

Many Christians want the gold without the labor it requires. Some have gone so far as to fool themselves and others, Edwards warned, into thinking they could have it by immediate revelation. “There are great numbers in the land,” he preached in 1748, who think “the spiritual meaning of the Scripture [is] suggested to ‘em by the Spirit of God: not merely by enlightening their minds” as they study, “but immediately suggesting and imposing the true meaning—as much as if they were told with a voice,” he reported. “There was such a gift as this in the primitive church,” he noted, but today “this gift is ceased” and “all pretenses [to it] are vain.”³⁴ The devil exploits human pretension, shining a false light on Scripture. But the true, divine light “don’t reveal any new truths not contained in the word of God.”³⁵ For Edwards, this axiom was crucial to reliable exegesis of the Bible. Word and Spirit work in tandem. Thus “spiritually to understand the Scripture,” he continued,

is rightly to understand what is in the Scripture, and what was in it before it was understood: ‘tis to understand rightly what used to be contained in the meaning of it; and not the making of a new meaning. . . . Spiritually to understand the Scripture, is to have the eyes of the mind opened, to behold the wonderful spiritual excellency of the glorious things contained in the true meaning of it, and that always were contained in it, ever since it was written.³⁶

There is a world of difference, Edwards taught, between illumination and immediate revelation.

Still others thought traditions and confessions gave them all they needed to understand the Word. They used history as a crutch that kept their Bible muscles weak. But here again, Edwards counseled those who sought divine light not to sell themselves short, but to delve into the Word. As he scratched upon a leaf in one of his “Miscellanies” notebooks, the Scriptures are sufficient to supply our spiritual needs. Ardent students “have no need of joining unto them the

writings of the fathers or church historians” to understand their meanings. Neither private revelation nor reductions of the Bible by the doctors of the church should suffice, in Edwards’ thinking, as alternatives to study. “God would have our whole dependence be upon the Scriptures,” he wrote, “because the greater our dependence is on the Word of God, the more direct and immediate is our dependence on God himself.”³⁷

“A Manifold Instruction in His Speech”

Intimate knowledge and love of God and His world--notional, spiritual, experiential, and active--loomed on Edwards’ mental horizon as the pearl of great price, the holy grail of exegesis. He attended to the Word of God to get to know his Maker and to imitate his Lord, sharing fellowship with God by the help of the Holy Spirit. As we saw in chapter one, he studied everything he could that might assist him on this quest. But he deemed the Word of God itself the most reliable means to the end for which he labored. The Bible, he believed, “is more sufficient for itself by far than any other book. Both the use and force of its own phrases is more fully to be learned from the Scriptures themselves, and also the customs and state of things on which the interpretation mainly depends.” Bible scholars, then, “should chiefly interpret Scripture by Scripture.” There is real and present danger in so emphasizing the study of ancient background material that we fail to place “weight enough on what we find in the Scripture,” or fail to place “such weight on it as God expects we should, on that which he has given to us on purpose, that it might be a sufficient, perfect, and infallible rule.”³⁸ Those who wish to know the Lord, he claimed, will not content themselves with artifacts from ancient times, but will listen most closely to the voice of God in the Word.

In more recent modern history, learned preachers have been taught to think primarily as historians, explaining sermon texts by reference to their ancient, social contexts. Only later, if at all, have they been taught to expound sermon texts in light of the whole canon, or the history of redemption, no matter how far apart the Bible's human authors stood. There are notable exceptions to this homiletical rule. But most of the time, when modern preachers have made theological moves they have grown rather nervous. Scholars caution them to scrutinize the structural viability of the bridges that they build between the ancient worlds of Scripture and the worlds of their parishioners. Historians know better than to make great leaps of faith without sufficient natural evidence that one can survive the fall. Better to keep one's sermon fixed upon the lessons of the past than attempt to unite—awkwardly--such patently different worlds.

But Edwards rarely worried about the bridges that he built. He spent a great deal of time on historical exegesis. He learned biblical history better than most, past or present. But he spent the bulk of his time reading Scripture theologically, canonically, religiously--with trust in its transcendence and an unapologetically synthetic methodology--applying it directly to the people in his care.

Many critics, thus, have labeled him a “spiritual” interpreter, a “pre-critical” reader.³⁹ And Edwards might have chosen to wear this label proudly part of the time. He found plenty in the Bible that was far above his head, too spiritual or difficult to comprehend by locking onto the letter of the text, asking mainly about its grammar and mundane historical referents. The Bible “includes various . . . things in its sense,” he suggested. “It is becoming of him who is infinite . . . and has everything in full and perfect view at once, and when he speaks, sees all things that have any manner of agreement with his words,” to offer us “a manifold instruction in his speech.”⁴⁰

Insofar as this was true, Edwards deemed it “unreasonable” to “make it an objection against the Christian revelation, that it contains some things that are . . . mysterious and difficult.”

If God will give us a revelation from heaven of the very truth concerning his own nature and acts, counsels and ways, and of the spiritual and invisible world, ‘tis unreasonable to expect any other, than that there should be many things in such a revelation that should be utterly beyond our understanding . . . I rather wonder that the Word of God contains no more mysteries in it; and I believe ‘tis because God is tender of us, and considers the weakness of our sight, and reveals only such things as he sees that man . . . can well enough bear.⁴¹

Edwards sensed, with Isaiah, that the thoughts and ways of God stood as far above his own as the heavens are above earth.⁴² So he trusted that the Word of God referred to some realities that transcend the limits of its literal signification--not to mention his capacity to navigate its signs.

We will look at this belief in detail in later chapters, watching Edwards as he works with Scripture’s “manifold instruction.” Before we do, though, it might help to review the major trends in the history of exegesis that informed the work of scholars living in Edwards’ biblical world. This will demonstrate for us that whereas Edwards was unique in some of the things he did with Scripture, he remained in good company as an early modern reader trying to work in both literal and spiritual exegesis.

Protestants have prided themselves on literal exegesis, by which they usually mean discussion of the meanings of the Bible based on study in the grammar of and history behind its parts. Ever since the Reformation, they have distanced this method from the so-called allegorical, or spiritual, exegesis often used by Roman Catholics to authenticate teaching that is not based squarely on a plain reading of Scripture. Their strategy has been to slice through the many

centuries of exegetical excess—overwrought renderings and outright fabrication of symbolic biblical meanings--repristinating a simpler, apostolic reading of Scripture and the faith that it commends. This involves a refutation of most older exegesis. Many modernists, however, have helped them cope with the havoc caused by such a critical method by affirming a dim view of the Catholic “dark ages” and their spiritual, and exegetical, barbarism.

Even early church fathers, though, advocated allegory. Origen, for instance, spoke of three senses of Scripture—its body, soul, and spirit--saying that God arranged for errors in the Bible’s bodily sense (i.e. historical sense) in order to elevate our thoughts to its “higher,” spiritual senses.⁴³ Augustine proved more cautious, teaching that those interpreting Scripture must be sure to base their readings on the literal sense of the text, or “the intention of the writer through whom the Holy Spirit” spoke. Even he, though, thought Bible texts could harbor multiple meanings and rejoiced that God revealed Himself in multidimensional ways. “Could God have built into the divine eloquence a more generous or bountiful gift,” he asked, “than the possibility of understanding the same words in several ways, all of them deriving confirmation from other no less divinely inspired passages [of Scripture]”?⁴⁴

Through most of the Middle Ages, a moderated form of Origen’s spiritual exegesis held sway within the world of serious Bible scholarship.⁴⁵ By the ninth century, in fact, most scholars had agreed that every passage in the Bible held four different senses: 1) a literal sense, conveyed by the “letter” of the text (from the Latin word *littera*); 2) an allegorical sense (from the Greek word ἀλληγορέω, “to speak figuratively”), which was also called the mystical or Christological sense and was symbolized by objects of the Bible’s literal sense; 3) a moral sense, referred to as the tropological sense (from the Greek word τροπολογέω, “to speak in tropes or figures of speech”), found when looking for the ethical or legal drift of the text; and 4) a heavenly sense, or

the anagogical sense (from ἀνάγω, “to lead up”), found when contemplating the eschatological import of the text.⁴⁶ This so-called “four-horse chariot” (*quadriga*) of medieval exegesis found its ultimate codification in the work of Thomas Aquinas.⁴⁷ It was memorized in schools with the help of a popular ditty:

The letter shows us what God and our Fathers did;

The allegory shows us where our faith is hid;

The moral meaning gives us rules of daily life;

The anagogy shows us where we end our strife.⁴⁸

From the twelfth century onward, theologians such as Hugh of St. Victor focused closely on the literal sense of Scripture, studying ancient grammar and logic to expound the plain meaning of important Bible texts. But, in doing so, they demonstrated the complex nature of the Bible’s literal meanings, blurring the lines between the literal sense and others in the *quadriga*.⁴⁹

At the time of the Reformation, biblical learning was transformed. Great strides were made in the study of the ancient biblical languages, textual scholars mended scribal errors in the Bible, and printing presses expedited the distribution of Bibles, biblical commentaries, and other Christian literature. Protestants, especially, touted gains in the study of the Scriptures and their meanings. And most Protestant Reformers followed Luther’s lead in emphasizing literal exegesis. In his well-known commentary on the epistle to the Galatians, when discussing chapter four, the *locus classicus* for those defending allegorical readings (Paul himself says there, in verse 24, that his discussion of Hagar, Sarah, Ishmael, and Isaac is “an allegory”), Luther vouched for the usefulness of spiritual exegesis but insisted on the precedence of the literal. “There are usually held to be four senses of Scripture,” he explained.

They are called the literal sense, the tropological, the allegorical, and the anagogical, so that Jerusalem, according to the literal sense, is the capital city of Judea; tropologically, a pure conscience or faith; allegorically, the church of Christ; and anagogically, the heavenly fatherland. Thus in this passage [Galatians 4:24ff.] Isaac and Ishmael are, in the literal sense, the two sons of Abraham; allegorically, the two covenants, or the synagog and the church, the Law and grace; tropologically, the flesh and the spirit, or virtue and vice, grace and sin; anagogically, glory and punishment, heaven and hell, yes, according to others, the angels and the demons, the blessed and the damned.

This “kind of game may . . . be permitted to those who want it,” he continued, provided they do not accustom themselves to the rashness of some, who tear the Scriptures to pieces as they please and make them uncertain. On the contrary, these interpretations add extra ornamentation, so to speak, to the main and legitimate sense, so that a topic may be more richly adorned by them, or—in keeping with Paul’s example—so that those who are not well instructed may be nurtured in gentler fashion with milky teaching, as it were. But these interpretations should not be brought forward with a view to establishing a doctrine of faith. For that four-horse team (even though I do not disapprove of it) is not sufficiently supported by the authority of Scripture, by the custom of the fathers, or by grammatical principles.⁵⁰

Calvin mounted even stronger claims about this text and the way so many used it to distort the meaning of Scripture. “Origen,” he warned,

and many others along with him, have seized the occasion of torturing Scripture, in every possible manner, away from the true sense. They concluded that the literal sense is too mean and poor, and that, under the outer bark of the letter, there lurk deep mysteries, which cannot be extracted but by beating out allegories. . . . For many centuries no man was considered to be ingenious, who had not the skill and daring necessary for changing into a variety of curious shapes the sacred word of God. This was undoubtedly a contrivance of Satan to undermine the authority of Scripture, and to take away from the reading of it the true advantage.⁵¹

As David Steinmetz and his students have made clear in recent years, the Protestant reformers packed a lot of what had formerly passed as “spiritual” understanding into their “literal” exegesis. They did not intend to reinvent the reading of the Bible in a modern, critical way. Rather, as Steinmetz has written, “they advocated . . . a letter pregnant with spiritual significance, a letter big-bellied with meaning formerly relegated by the quadriga to allegory or tropology.”⁵² And as Richard Muller confirms,

The literal or historical sense of the text argued by Reformation-era exegetes was not . . . a bare literal understanding of the text but rather an understanding that took into consideration the larger theological context and specifically the meaning of the divine author as presented in the Bible as a whole. Thus the literal meaning of a prophetic text was understood as the fulfillment of the prophecy. So too the literal sense was understood as the thing signified by a figurative or metaphorical passage. The doctrinal, moral and eschatological dimensions of the *quadriga* were not lost but rather were found more precisely lodged in the literal sense. Thus a

distinct allegorical and anagogical sense was often scorned by the Reformers at the same time that the immediate reference of the text for Christian doctrine or Christian hope was emphasized. So too a separate tropological sense was set aside, but the moral issues and demands raised in the text for Israel and the early Christian community were understood as directly raised for the ongoing community of belief.⁵³

Luther, Calvin and their colleagues never countenanced a bare, wooden, literal exegesis. Their own work with Scripture proved robustly theological. They did, however, champion a plainer, more disciplined, canonical reading of Scripture than had hitherto prevailed within the Roman Catholic Church.⁵⁴

By the time of Edwards' birth, most mainstream Protestants agreed on the supremacy of Scripture's literal sense. For the Puritans and their heirs, the reasons were largely pastoral. If the study of the Word was ever to captivate the laity, its meanings must be plain, in the main, to simple minds. As confessed by the divines who assembled at Westminster: "All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all; yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed, for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other that not only the learned but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them."⁵⁵ A "sufficient understanding" would require earnest effort. Some passages might not be understood by everyone. But the Bible's main storyline was given for all to read. Indeed, its message of redemption carried the power of God to save even the humblest believer.

Despite the stated Protestant preference for the literal sense of Scripture, though, spiritual exegesis did survive the Reformation—and not only in the guise of especially pregnant literal

commentary on the text. Luther himself often read the Bible allegorically.⁵⁶ Calvin did so less frequently--but did so all the same--and came to master the art of biblical typology.⁵⁷ The Puritans, as well, practiced spiritual exegesis, particularly in places such as the Song of Solomon. In fact, Puritan preaching manuals regularized principles for such interpretation, offering guidelines even for the “gathering” of “allegories.” Bernard’s *Faithfull Shepheard* gave the following advice:

First, gather them after the true and naturall sense be delivered, and not before. Secondly, let them not be too farre fetched, strained, obscure, or foolish: but agreeing with the Analogie of Faith, and other manifest Scriptures. . . . Thirdly, handle an allegorie briefly, and use them not too often. Fourthly, let the use and end be for instruction of life, but not for any prooffe of doctrine. Fifthly [*sic*], let the ancient, grave, and wise collect them. It is not a safe way for young beginners not well exercised in the Scriptures, and grounded in the trueth. Allegories are delightfull, and therefore youth will (as I may say) *lascivire*, soone wax wanton immoderately herein, and so instead of using, abuse the Scripture.⁵⁸

Like many early Protestants, then, Edwards practiced literal and spiritual exegesis.⁵⁹ He majored in the literal sense. Scholars sometimes overwork his spiritualizing tendencies. He labored as a preacher, though, a minister of the Word. So he took advantage of all the tools that helped him make its contents come alive for those in his care.⁶⁰

Edwards did things with the Bible few would do with it today. His theological exegesis fails to meet our modern standards of grammatical, historical, and scientific rigor. He was not a commentator in the usual sense of the word. Nor did he labor as a scholar in the field of ancient history. He studied what he deemed to be the very Word of God as a congregational minister and

Christian theologian. He was biased in its favor. He believed that it cohered. And he read and spoke about it as a matter of life and death. Further, as Stein has emphasized, he sometimes “celebrated the violence at the heart of the biblical accounts,” applying it in ways that can offend more peaceable Christians.⁶¹ He cheered the spread of the gospel through the rise and fall of nations. He believed that God is glorified when sinners go to hell. He would not pass muster in our leading universities.

However, in many respects, Edwards stands as a typical Reformed Bible scholar of the early modern period. In our late modern age, this point deserves special emphasis. For ever since the rise of historical theology in nineteenth-century Europe, we have tolerated a truncated, telescoped conception of Reformed exegesis, even Protestant theology, before the time of Schleiermacher. Most have sought to measure Protestant efforts in the present with the work of Luther, Calvin, and other Reformation forebears. Rarely have they asked about the thinking in between, about the ways in which the values of the Protestant founding fathers have been handed on through time, on the ground, from place to place. We have lost touch with much of early modern Protestant history after the Reformation period. We have certainly lost touch with Edwards’ exegetical world. The recovery work to follow may well render Edwards’ exegesis odd, a bit distasteful. To a certain extent it was. But it also made good sense to many Christians in his day--and it may have something left to offer Christians in our own. As a host of theologians have bemoaned in recent years, Christians lost something crucial in the triumph of grammatical-historical exegesis and its rather new conception of the literal sense of Scripture. They lost their old conviction that the Bible hangs together by the power of the Spirit. Thus they lost their old facility interpreting the scope and larger meanings of the canon. As summarized famously by Yale’s Brevard Childs more than a generation ago,

the historical critical method brought a new understanding of the literal sense of the biblical text as the original historical sense. But what was intended as an attempt to free the text from the allegedly heavy hand of tradition and dogma proved to be a weapon which cut both ways. The effect was actually to destroy the significance, integrity and confidence in the literal sense of the text. Whereas during the medieval period the crucial issue lay in the usage made of the multiple layers of meaning *above* the text, the issue now turns on the multiple layers *below* the text.⁶²

Ancient history, not the knowledge and love of God, has now become the holy grail of exegesis. Scholars ride on a different quest. So unless we spend sufficient time acquainting ourselves with Edwards' own, exegetical world, we will fail to understand his rather different scholarly errand, its historical significance, and existential value. We will fail to see what animated Edwards' life and work. We will enjoy "no notion at all" of that which captivated his mind.

¹ Jonathan Edwards, sermon on Luke 10:38-42 (July 1754), Box 7, F. 560, L. 16r., Beinecke; Edwards, "Personal Narrative," *WJE*, 16:801; Jonathan Edwards, "Life Through Christ Alone," in *WJE*, 10:526; Jonathan Edwards, "The Way of Holiness," *WJE*, 10:477; Jonathan Edwards, "The Duty of Harkening to God's Voice," *WJE*, 10:441; Edwards, "Miscellanies" No. 6, *WJE*, 13:202-203; Jonathan Edwards, "Nothing upon Earth Can Represent the Glories of Heaven," *WJE*, 14:139-40; Jonathan Edwards, "Divine Love Alone Lasts Eternally," *WJE*, 8:363; Edwards, sermon on Psalm 119:162, Box 3, F. 189, L. 1r., Beinecke; Edwards, "The Importance and Advantage of a Thorough Knowledge of Divine Truth," 38, 35; Jonathan Edwards, sermon on 1 Cor. 2:11-13, Box 10, F. 719, L. 3v., Beinecke; Jonathan Edwards, sermon on Matthew

13:23, Box 6, F. 473, L. 22r., Beinecke; Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, WJE, 2:438; and Edwards, “Miscellanies” No. 202, WJE, 13:202. For more on Edwards’ doctrine of Scripture, see Schweitzer, *God Is a Communicative Being*, 81-112; and McClymond and McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 130-48.

² For examples of this language, see WJE, 2:457; 4:228, 380, 481; 15:231, 518; 17:180; 18:236; 19:307; 24:513; Edwards, sermon on Luke 10:38-42 (July 1754), Box 7, F. 560, L. 6v., Beinecke; and Jonathan Edwards, sermon on 1 Corinthians 2:11-13 (May 7, 1740, at the “ordination of Mr. Billing”), Box 10, F. 719, L. 3v., Beinecke.

³ In the “Blank Bible,” at 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Edwards wrote merely “See Mastricht, pp. 17-18,” a reference to Mastricht on holy Scripture (“*De Sacra Scriptura*”) in *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, 17-18. See WJE, 24:1133. Edwards did not deem his own doctrine of biblical inspiration *sui generis* or unusual. In fact, the only sermon he preached on 2 Timothy 3:16 foregoes discussion of the manner of the inspiration Scripture, focusing rather on the theme that there “must be some Word of God. ‘Tis unreasonable to think that God would always keep silence and never say anything to mankind. . . . how unreasonable is it to suppose that He should be a King and never say anything to His subjects. . . . be a King and never tell them what His will or what His commands are, that His subjects may obey Him,” etc. See Edwards, sermon on 2 Timothy 3:16, in *Selections from the Unpublished Writings of Jonathan Edwards of America*, ed. Grosart, 191. For more on Mastricht’s view of Scripture, see Neele, *The Art of Living to God*, 97-101; and Aza Goudriaan, *Reformed Orthodoxy and Philosophy, 1625-1750: Gisbertus Voetius, Petrus van Mastricht, and Anthonius Driessen*, Brill’s Series in Church History (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 54-65.

⁴ See Edwards' note at 1 Chronicles 28:19, "Blank Bible," *WJE*, 24:410, in which he quotes the first of Owen's five volumes on the work of the Holy Spirit, *ΠΝΕΥΜΑΤΟΛΟΓΙΑ; or, A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit. Wherein an Account Is Given of His Name, Nature, Personality, Dispensation, Operations, and Effects* (London: J. Darby for Nathaniel Ponder, 1674), 105. According to Kopic, "Owen, John (1616-1683)," in McKim, ed., *Dictionary of Major Biblical Interpreters*, "one cannot appreciate Owen's approach to Scripture and interpretation without focusing on his view of the Holy Spirit's activity in the formation of the Scriptures and in the reception of the Scriptures by their readers" (796), a comment applicable to Edwards as well.

⁵ See, for example, Lewis Bayly, *The Practice of Pietie: Directing a Christian How to Walke That He May Please God*, 17th ed. (London: Robert Allott, 1616), who said the content of the canon "is indited by the Holy Ghost" (248); and Edwards' own copy of Robert Millar, *The History of the Propagation of Christianity, and Overthrow of Paganism . . .*, 2 vols., 3d ed. (London: A. Millar, 1731), held in the Firestone Library: "Who but an infinitely Holy God could endite such sublime and pure Doctrine? Could foretell in the Old Testament the miracles that Christ did in the New? Or could prophesie of all the great Events that came to pass in the church of God, with such infallible certainty? These Things so recorded in the sacred Writings, are Witnesses beyond all Exception, of a Mission from Heaven, and of Divine Inspiration" (1:123).

⁶ Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 186. As Millar added later in *The History of the Propagation of Christianity*, a work that Edwards owned: "In the whole compiling of their sacred Writings, the Divine Spirit not only immediately suggested and dictated to them such Things as were Matters of pure Revelation; but he illuminated their Minds in the several Doctrines and prophetic Truths they delivered in Writing; he refreshed their Memories as to Things they

knew in a common Way; he helped to bring forth Things divinely impressed on their Imagination; and so conducted them in all their Composures, as they neither omitted any Thing he thought necessary or expedient, nor inserted any Thing but what would serve his Purpose; but selected these Things he knew would be most profitable for Doctrine, Reproof, Correction and Instruction to his People, from one Age to another” (1:122).

⁷ *WJE*, 9:365, and 14:265-66. Edwards thought the whole New Testament was written by the apostles, “excepting the writing of Mark and Luke, who were companions of the apostles and wrote under their eye: Mark of the apostle Peter, and Luke [under that of] Paul.” See *WJE*, 25:289. As is seen in much of Edwards’ preaching and commentary on Hebrews, he believed that St. Paul penned that long-disputed book (which was written anonymously). And he was sure that all the apostles were inspired by the Spirit as they wrote what became the New Testament: “‘Tis an evidence that the apostles had their doctrine from the inspiration of some invisible guide and instructor, that there was such a vast and apparent difference made in them at once after Pentecost. They were illiterate, simple, undesigning, ignorant men before; but afterward, how do they talk in their speeches and epistles! They don’t speak as being anything at a loss about the scheme of salvation and divine gospel mysteries. With what positiveness and authority do they teach, in how learned, understanding a manner! How came Paul by his schemes and by all his knowledge of the Christian doctrines and mysteries, immediately upon his conversion? He was evidently under the guidance and influence of some Spirit in his teaching.” Edwards, “Miscellanies” No. 465, *WJE*, 13:507. For more on Edwards and the inspiration of Scripture, see Brown, *Jonathan Edwards and the Bible*, 103-106.

⁸ See esp. Calvin’s *Institutes*, 1.7.5.

⁹ See the final paragraph of the “Preface” to *The Bay Psalm Book: A Facsimile Reprint of the First Edition of 1640* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), written anonymously but said to have been penned by John Cotton: “If therefore the verses are not alwayes so smooth and elegant as some may desire or expect; let them consider that Gods Altar needs not our pollishings: Ex. 20. For wee have respected rather a plaine translation, then to smooth our verses with the sweetnes of any paraphrase, and soe have attended Conscience rather then Elegance, fidelity rather then poetry, in translating the hebrew words into english language, and Davids poetry into english meetre; that soe wee may sing in Sion the Lords songs of prayse according to his owne will; untill hee take us from hence, and wipe away all our teares, & bid us enter into our masters ioye to sing eternall Halleluiahs” (unpaginated); and Edwards, *Religious Affections*, *WJE*, 2:307.

¹⁰ Edwards, “Profitable Hearers of the Word,” *WJE*, 14:251-52; Edwards, “Miscellanies” No. 410, *WJE*, 13:470-71; Edwards, “Types of the Messiah,” *WJE*, 11:253; and Jonathan Edwards, sermon on Jeremiah 23:29 (April 1749), Box 5, F. 361, L. 1r., Beinecke. For more on these themes, see Edwards, “Miscellanies” No. 256, *WJE*, 13:365-66; and Edwards, *Religious Affections*, *WJE*, 2:291-311.

¹¹ Jonathan Edwards, “Yield to God’s Word, or Be Broken by His Hand,” *WJE*, 25:211; Edwards, “Miscellanies” No. 382, *WJE*, 13:451; Edwards, *Religious Affections*, *WJE*, 2:304-306; and Jonathan Edwards, “A Spiritual Understanding of Divine Things Denied to the Unregenerate,” *WJE*, 14:78. For more from Edwards on this theme, see Jonathan Edwards, “True Nobleness of Mind,” *WJE*, 14:233; Jonathan Edwards, “A Divine and Supernatural Light,” *WJE*, 17:415; Jonathan Edwards, “Mercy and Not Sacrifice,” *WJE*, 22:131-32; Jonathan Edwards, “The Mind,” *WJE*, 6:346; Edwards, “Miscellanies” No. 333, *WJE*, 13:410; and

Jonathan Edwards, sermon on Exodus 9:12-16 (July 1747), Box 1, F. 20, L. 2r.-2v., Beinecke.

Edwards' appeal to both internal and external evidence for biblical authenticity was common in the Calvinist tradition, as was his stress on the priority of the witness of the Spirit in the minds of true believers. By the late seventeenth century, though, many modern Calvinists placed much greater emphasis on external evidence. See Calvin's *Institutes*, 1.7-8; *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, 1.5; Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, vol. 2, *Holy Scripture: The Cognitive Foundation of Theology*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 147, 256; Jeffrey Mallinson, *Faith, Reason, and Revelation in Theodore Beza, 1519-1605*, Oxford Theological Monographs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 175-206; Goudriaan, *Reformed Orthodoxy and Philosophy, 1625-1750*, 54-65; and Brown, *Jonathan Edwards and the Bible*, 38, 55-56, 60, who suggests that Edwards also laid more emphasis on external evidence toward the end of his life (60).

¹² Edwards, "Notes on the Apocalypse," *WJE*, 5:105; Jonathan Edwards, "Stupid as Stones," *WJE*, 17:176; Edwards, "Heeding the Word and Losing It," *WJE*, 19:48; and Jonathan Edwards, "Gospel Ministers a Savor of Life or of Death," *WJE*, 22:206-207.

¹³ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, *WJE*, 2:102-03; Edwards, "Blank Bible," *WJE*, 24:1143; and Edwards, sermon on Jeremiah 23:29, L. 13r., L. 15r. It should be noted here that Calvinists were not the only ones in Edwards' world with a high view of biblical authority. Few public figures would have dissented on the matter, at least not extensively and formally. See, for example, Locke's defense of the authority of Scripture as discussed in Victor Nuovo, "Locke's Proof of the Divine Authority of Scripture," in *Philosophy and Religion in Enlightenment Britain*, ed. Ruth Savage, 56-76.

¹⁴ Edwards, “A Spiritual Understanding of Divine Things Denied to the Unregenerate,” *WJE*, 14:82; and Jonathan Edwards, *Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God*, *WJE*, 4:253, in which he continued by discussing the devil’s hatred of the Bible: “The Devil has ever shewn a mortal spite and hatred towards that holy book, the Bible: he has done all that has been in his power to extinguish that light, and to draw men off from it: he knows that ‘tis that light by which his kingdom of darkness is to be overthrown. . . . Every text is a dart to torment that old serpent: he has felt the stinging smart thousands of times; therefore he is enraged against the Bible, and hates every word in it: and therefore we may be sure that he never will go about to raise persons’ esteem of it, or affection to it” (254).

¹⁵ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, *WJE*, 2:115; and Jonathan Edwards, *Some Thoughts*, *WJE*, 4:397, 386-88.

¹⁶ Jonathan Edwards, *Faithful Narrative*, *WJE*, 4:181, 184; Edwards, *Religious Affections*, *WJE*, 2:292-93; Jonathan Edwards to the Rev. Benjamin Colman, 30 May 1735, *WJE*, 16:54; and Jonathan Edwards, *Life of David Brainerd*, *WJE*, 8:474-75. Edwards’ increased love for Scripture and for union with God through Scripture is a major theme in Withrow, *Becoming Divine*, esp. 171-96.

¹⁷ See, for example, Edwards, “A Divine and Supernatural Light,” *WJE*, 17:415, 422-23; Edwards, “Light in a Dark World, a Dark Heart,” *WJE*, 19:710; Jonathan Edwards, *Dissertation Concerning the End for Which God Created the World*, *WJE*, 8:419-20; Edwards, “Images of Divine Things” No. 156, *WJE*, 11:106; and Jonathan Edwards, “Importance of Doctrines & of Mysteries in Religion,” in “Controversy Book C” [so titled by Jonathan Edwards, Jr.], Box 15, F. 1203, pp. 190-298, Beinecke. (Edwards himself paginated “Controversy Book C,” but numbered

blocks of text rather than sides of manuscript leaves, so his “pages” do not correspond to pages of the book. Moreover, this section of the book includes notes taken on other topics as well.)

¹⁸ Edwards, “True Nobleness of Mind,” *WJE*, 14:231-32. “Indeed,” Edwards added in the *Freedom of the Will*, “it is a glorious argument of the divinity of the holy Scriptures, that they teach such doctrines, which in one age and another, through the blindness of men’s minds, and strong prejudices of their hearts, are rejected, as most absurd and unreasonable, by the wise and great men of the world; which yet, when they are most carefully and strictly examined, appear to be exactly agreeable to the most demonstrable, certain, and natural dictates of reason” (*WJE*, 1:439).

¹⁹ Edwards, *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God*, *WJE*, 4:240; and Edwards, “Light in a Dark World, a Dark Heart,” *WJE*, 19:720.

²⁰ Edwards, “Miscellanies” No. 544, *WJE*, 18:89-90; and Edwards, “The Importance and Advantage of a Thorough Knowledge of Divine Truth,” *The Sermons of Jonathan Edwards*, 46. On this theme, see also Edwards, “Miscellanies” No. 519, *WJE*, 18:64; Edwards, “Miscellanies” No. 837, *WJE*, 20:52-53; and Edwards, “Light in a Dark World, a Dark Heart,” *WJE*, 19:721-22, where he claimed, “it has been owing to the Bible, and that only, that the world has been brought to own one only true God ‘Tis this, and this only, by which the world ever received any account at all that was not childish, and ridiculous, and self-confuted; upon what terms man, after he has sinned, may be reconciled to God, or whether he can be reconciled at all; or any tolerable account what punishment men should have for sin, and what happiness God intended to bestow on good men.”

²¹ Edwards, “*Miscellanies*” No. 350, *WJE*, 13:421 (similar “*Miscellanies*” statements are in *WJE*, 13:422-26, 537, 18:140, and 20:52-53); Edwards, “Importance of Doctrines & of Mysteries

in Religion,” 190; and Edwards, *A History of the Work of Redemption*, WJE, 9:520. My view of Edwards’ claims about the importance of revelation differ from those of both Miller and Zakai who say, in Miller’s words, that Edwards exalted “nature to a level of authority co-equal with revelation.” See Miller, *Images or Shadows of Divine Things*, 28; and Zakai, *Jonathan Edwards’s Philosophy of History*, 72-74. Whereas thinkers such as Locke, whose role in Edwards’ life was not as great as Miller has suggested, viewed the Bible as “infallible” but readers “very fallible” and valorized the “plain” truths of “Natural Religion,” Edwards flipped this logic on its head. He asserted that human reason as applied to the book of nature was fallible and required revelation to illumine and correct it. “Hence we Learn that Rule for Interpreting [Scripture] so much insisted upon by many of Late viz. first to determine by our own Reason what is agreeable to the moral Perfections of [God and] then to Interpret the [Scripture] by that is an unjust [and] fallacious one. Thus to do is certainly to do the thing that has already been shewn to be absurd, viz. to make the dictates of our own Reason the highest Rule in Judging of the things of [God] and to make it a rule to Revela[tion] itself.” See Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 3.9.23; and Jonathan Edwards, sermon on I Corinthians 2:11-13 (May 7, 1740, at the “ordination of Mr. Billing”), Box 10, F. 719, Beinecke. For more on Edwards, the relationship of reason and revelation, and our need for the latter, see McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 71-86; Gerald R. McDermott, “Revelation as Divine Communication through Reason, Scripture and Tradition,” in *Jonathan Edwards as Contemporary*, ed. Schweitzer, 187-205; Schweitzer, *God Is a Communicative Being*, 53-80; McClymond and McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 130-48; and my “Editor’s Introduction” to Edwards, “*Miscellanies*,” 1153-1360, WJE, 23:19-29. N.B. Here again, Edwards followed *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, 1.1.

²² Edwards, “*Miscellanies*” No. 408, *WJE*, 13:469-70.

²³ Edwards, “Light in a Dark World, a Dark Heart,” *WJE*, 19:724; and Edwards, “A Spiritual Understanding of Divine Things Denied to the Unregenerate,” *WJE*, 14:77. Edwards’ other well-known comments on this theme include his sermon, “A Divine and Supernatural Light,” *WJE*, 17:408-26; and Edwards, *Religious Affections*, *WJE*, 2:205-206.

²⁴ Jonathan Edwards, sermon on Luke 11:27-28, Box 14, F. 1065, L. 1v., L. 6v.-7r., Beinecke; Jonathan Edwards, “The Pure in Heart Blessed,” *WJE*, 17:65-66; and Jonathan Edwards, “Treatise on Grace,” *WJE*, 21:178-80. Of the numerous other texts Edwards devoted to this theme, see esp. *Religious Affections*, *WJE*, 2:205-06, 225, 266-91, 296-97, 301; “*Miscellanies*” Nos. 123, 141, and 397, *WJE*, 13:286-87, 297-98, 462-63; “*Miscellanies*” Nos. 628, 683, 782, *WJE*, 18:156-57, 245-48, 452-66; and numerous Edwards sermons, such as “A Divine and Supernatural Light,” *WJE*, 17:408-26; “A Spiritual Understanding of Divine Things Denied to the Unregenerate,” *WJE*, 14:70-96; “False Light and True,” *WJE*, 19:122-42; “Light in a Dark World, a Dark Heart,” *WJE*, 19:707-33; Edwards, “The Threefold Work of the Holy Ghost,” *WJE*, 14:407; “Profitable Hearers of the Word,” *WJE*, 14:246-77; and “The Importance and Advantage of a Thorough Knowledge of Divine Truth,” *WJE*, 22:30-31. Of course, many other thinkers in the history of the church have treated divine illumination and its epistemic effects. In Edwards’ Calvinist tradition, Calvin himself was most important for saying things about these subjects that were similar to, though not quite as fulsome as, Edwards’ comments. See esp. Barbara Pitkin, *What Pure Eyes Could See: Calvin’s Doctrine of Faith in Its Exegetical Context*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

²⁵ Edwards, sermon on Luke 10:38-42, L. 3r.; Edwards, “Profitable Hearers of the Word,” *WJE*, 14:266; Edwards, “Heeding the Word, and Losing It,” *WJE*, 19:47; Edwards, “Images of Divine

Things,” *WJE*, 11:93; and Jonathan Edwards, sermon on Heb. 6:7, Box 11, F. 820, L. 17r., Beinecke.

²⁶ Jonathan Edwards, sermon on Jeremiah 8:8 (December 1749), Box 5, F. 353, L. 1r., Beinecke; Edwards, “A Spiritual Understanding of Divine Things Denied to the Unregenerate,” *WJE*, 14:72, 79; Edwards, “Profitable Hearers of the Word,” *WJE*, 14:248-49; Edwards, “Treatise on Grace,” *WJE*, 21:180 (on “common grace” and “common illuminations”); and Edwards, “Miscellanies” No. 123, *WJE*, 13:287. On the epistemological limits of the unconverted reader, see also Edwards, *Religious Affections*, *WJE*, 2:301; Jonathan Edwards, sermon on Psalm 119:18 (October [1751?]), Box 13, F. 972, L. 1r.-v., Beinecke; and Edwards, “A Divine and Supernatural Light,” *WJE*, 17:421, where Edwards said the following: “It is not rational to suppose, if there be any such excellency in divine things, that wicked men should see it. ‘Tis not rational to suppose, that those whose minds are full of spiritual pollution, and under the power of filthy lusts, should have any relish or sense of divine beauty, or excellency; or that their minds should be susceptible of that light that is in its own nature so pure and heavenly. It need not seem at all strange, that sin should so blind the mind.” On increasing spiritual knowledge by the practice of genuine holiness, see also Edwards, “Miscellanies” No. 141, *WJE*, 13:297-98; and Edwards, “Much in Deeds of Charity,” in *The Sermons of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Kimnach, Minkema, and Sweeney, 197-211.

²⁷ Many early Christian ascetics, of course, taught that genuine knowledge of the teachings of the Bible required spiritual regeneration, biblical holiness and virtue. See the helpful recent summary in Christopher J. Kelly, *Cassian’s Conferences: Scriptural Interpretation and the Monastic Ideal*, Ashgate New Critical Thinking in Religion, Theology and Biblical Studies (Farnham, U.K.: Ashgate, 2012), 88-92. Less well known but more important to Edwards’ own view of the

matter were the early modern Protestant renditions of this doctrine. William Perkins wrote in *The Arte of Prophecyng*, which Edwards owned, “he that is not godly, howsoever hee may understand the Scriptures, yet doth he not perceive the inward sense and experience of the word in his heart.” As Neele summarizes Mastricht’s exposition of the matter, “without a renewal and guidance by the Holy Spirit, Scripture cannot be rightly understood.” And as Knapp says of Owen, “foundational to Owen’s exegetical methodology is his firm belief that the Holy Spirit guides the reader into an understanding of the mind of God as revealed through Scripture.” See William Perkins, *The Arte of Prophecyng: Or, A Treatise Concerning the Sacred and Onely True Manner and Methode of Preaching*, in *The Workes of That Famous and Worthy Minister of Christ, in the Universitie of Cambridge, Mr. William Perkins*, 2:671; Neele, *The Art of Living to God*, 143 (cf. Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, 1.2.53-62); and Knapp, “Understanding the Mind of God,” 55-62, 376. On this principle in Owen, see also Trueman, “Faith Seeking Understanding,” 152-57.

²⁸ *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, 1.6.

²⁹ Benedict de Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, ed. Jonathan Israel, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 112: “It remains now to examine the views of those who disagree with us. First, I shall consider the opinion of those who hold that the natural light of reason does not have the power to interpret Scripture and that for this a supernatural light is absolutely essential. . . . We have already proved that none of the difficulties in the interpretation of Scripture arises from the inadequacy of the natural light, but only from human carelessness (not to mention malice) in neglecting to construct the history of the Bible. . . . [T]he prophets and Apostles used to preach not only to the faithful but, primarily, to unbelievers and impious persons, who were thus enabled to understand the meaning of the

prophets and Apostles. . . . [I]t would have been pointless for Moses to make laws if they could be understood only by the faithful who need no law. Hence those who postulate the need for a supernatural light to interpret the minds of the prophets and Apostles truly seem to be lacking in natural light themselves; so I am very far from believing that such men have a divine supernatural gift.” We have no evidence that Edwards read this famous text himself, but he had access to its argument in several of his sources. See Brown, *Jonathan Edwards and the Bible*, 34-35. On the importance of this argument in Edwards’ mental world, see also Rosalie Colie, “Spinoza and the Early English Deists,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 20 (January 1959): 23-46; Rosalie Colie, “Spinoza in England, 1665-1730,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 107 (June 1963): 183-219; Popkin, “Spinoza and Bible Scholarship,” 399; and Popkin, “The Religious Background of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy,” 43.

³⁰ Edwards, “A Spiritual Understanding of Divine Things Denied to the Unregenerate,” *WJE*, 14:81; and Edwards, *Religious Affections*, *WJE*, 2:285.

³¹ Two exceptions that prove this rule may be found in Edwards’ passing reference to Locke and the *Essay* in “Miscellanies” No. 782, *WJE*, 18:454, and his brief use of the *Essay* to promote his own position on professing genuine faith as prerequisite to membership in a local Christian church, *Misrepresentations Corrected, and Truth Vindicated*, *WJE*, 12:389, n. 4: “Mr. Locke says, *Human Understanding*, ed. 7, vol. 2, p. 103, ‘He that uses words of any language without distinct ideas in his mind, to which he applies them, does so far as he uses them in discourse, only make a noise without any sense or signification.’”

³² Edwards, *Religious Affections*, *WJE*, 2:296-97; Edwards, “Miscellanies” No. 239, *WJE*, 13:354-55; Edwards, “Miscellanies” No. 123, *WJE*, 13:286-87; and Edwards, “A Spiritual Understanding of Divine Things Denied to the Unregenerate,” *WJE*, 14:80. Cf. Locke, *Essay*,

2.1.4 and *passim* (which Edwards seems to have used but did not cite in the sermon quoted). For more from Edwards on this Lockean theme, see Edwards, “Miscellanies” No. 397, *WJE*, 13:462-63. For more general views of Edwards’ work on spiritual understanding (not concerned, at least primarily, with biblical exegesis), see especially Miklos Vetö, “La Connaissance Spirituelle Selon Jonathan Edwards,” *Revue de Theologie et de Philosophie* 111 (1979): 233-51, trans. Michael J. McClymond as “Spiritual Knowledge according to Jonathan Edwards,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 31 (April 1996): 161-81; Michael J. McClymond, *Encounters with God: An Approach to the Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, Religion in America Series (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 9-26; and Kyle C. Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards’s Theology: A Reinterpretation*, T & T Clark Studies in Systematic Theology (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 149-76. Cf. William J. Wainwright, “Jonathan Edwards and His Puritan Predecessors,” in *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity*, ed. Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 224-40, which offers a rather more partial, critical view of Edwards on this theme.

³³ Edwards, “A Spiritual Understanding of Divine Things Denied to the Unregenerate,” *WJE*, 14:94-95; and Edwards, “Profitable Hearers of the Word,” *WJE*, 14:265, 246-47. This is an ancient doctrine, of course, taught most famously by Augustine in defense of the hard work involved in spiritual exegesis. See his *De Doctrina Christiana* (*On Christian Doctrine*, completed in 426/7), 2.10, 13-15; and *De Genesi ad litteram* (*The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, written from 401-415), 1.20.40.

³⁴ Jonathan Edwards, “Extraordinary Gifts of the Spirit Are Inferior to Graces of the Spirit,” *WJE*, 25:308-09. On this theme, see also Edwards, *Religious Affections*, *WJE*, 2:278-79; and Edwards, *Some Thoughts*, *WJE*, 4:437-38.

³⁵ Edwards, “False Light and True,” *WJE*, 19:134.

³⁶ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, *WJE*, 2:280-81. On this, see also Edwards, “Miscellanies” No. 782, *WJE*, 18:462; Edwards, “Extraordinary Gifts of the Spirit Are Inferior to Graces of the Spirit,” *WJE*, 25:303-304; Edwards, *Religious Affections*, *WJE*, 2:218-39, 294-95; and Jonathan Edwards, “Love More Excellent Than Extraordinary Gifts of the Spirit,” in *WJE*, 8:168-69.

³⁷ Edwards, “Miscellanies” No. 535, *WJE*, 18:78-80. As Chad van Dixhoorn demonstrates, the Westminster divines also disagreed fiercely on the usefulness of creeds and confessions in exegesis. Some had little to no use for binding theological forms. See Chad B. van Dixhoorn, “New Taxonomies of the Westminster Assembly (1643-52): The Creedal Controversy as Case Study,” *Reformation and Renaissance Review: Journal of the Society for Reformation Studies* 6 (2004): 82-106.

³⁸ Edwards, “Miscellanies” No. 828, *WJE*, 18:538-39.

³⁹ On this, see Brown, *Jonathan Edwards and the Bible*, esp. 1-26.

⁴⁰ Edwards, “Miscellanies” No. 851, *WJE*, 20:80.

⁴¹ Edwards, “Miscellanies” No. 583, *WJE*, 18:118-19.

⁴² See Jonathan Edwards, sermon on Isaiah 55:7-9 (January 1745), Box 5, F. 331, Beinecke.

⁴³ Origen, *On First Principles* (*De Principiis* in Latin; in Greek, *Periarchon*; c. 230), IV, ii, 4, 9. See the English translation of G. W. Butterworth (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1973; orig. 1936), 275-87. Of course, more orthodox Fathers—Justin, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, as well as a host of other worthies--also employed allegorical and typological methods of interpreting the Bible.

⁴⁴ *De Doctrina Christiana*, 3.84-85 (English trans. from Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, ed. and trans. R. P. H. Green, Oxford Early Christian Texts [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995], 169-

71). On this theme, see also Augustine, *Confessions*, 12 (second half). For more general orientation to Patristic exegesis, see Henri De Lubac, *History and Spirit: The Understanding of Scripture according to Origen*, trans. Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007); Robert M. Grant, *The Letter and the Spirit* (London: S.P.C.K., 1957); Jean Danielou, *From Shadows to Reality: Studies in the Biblical Typology of the Fathers*, trans. Dom Wulstan Hibberd (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1960); Manlio Simonetti, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church: An Historical Introduction to Patristic Exegesis*, trans. John A. Hughes (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994); Thomas Finan and Vincent Twomey, eds., *Spiritual Interpretation in the Fathers: Letter and Spirit* (Blackrock, Ireland: Four Courts Press, Ltd., 1995); R. A. Markus, *Signs and Meanings: World and Text in Ancient Christianity* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1996); Frances M. Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Frederick Van Fleteren and Joseph C. Schnaubelt, eds., *Augustine: Biblical Exegete*, Augustinian Historical Institute (New York: Peter Lang, 2001); Frances Young, Lewis Ayres, and Andrew Louth, eds., *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); John J. O’Keefe and R. R. Reno, *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005); Jason Byassee, *Praise Seeking Understanding: Reading the Psalms with Augustine*, Radical Traditions (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007); Henning Graf Reventlow, *History of Biblical Interpretation, Volume 1: From the Old Testament to Origen*, trans. Leo G. Perdue, Resources for Biblical Study (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009); Kelly, *Cassian’s Conferences*; and Peter W. Martens, *Origen and Scripture: The Contours of the Exegetical Life*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁴⁵ Modern teachers often distinguish between Origen's "Alexandrian" school of biblical exegesis and the more temperate school of "Antioch," exemplified in textbooks by the likes of Lucian of Antioch, Diodorus of Tarsus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and John Chrysostom. It is said that Alexandrian exegesis was fanciful, full of allegorical excess, while the school of Antioch was much more careful and historical. The difference between these schools is often exaggerated, however. In point of fact, there never was much of a "school" in Antioch, at least nothing that could rival that in Alexandria. Further, exegetes in both groups shared a great deal in common (and yet differed from one another within the schools). Nevertheless, there were interpreters among the church fathers who opposed the lofty allegorizing found within the writings of a few of the Alexandrians. Diodorus of Tarsus (in *On the Difference between Theory and Allegory*, only fragments of which remain), Theodore of Mopsuestia (in *Concerning Allegory and History against Origen*, 5 vols., which is no longer extant), and John Chrysostom (in many sermons and commentaries which do survive), distanced their own exegesis from the methods of Origen. Their famous doctrine of "theoria" (θεωρία, a Greek word meaning "vision, insight, or contemplation"), according to which the Hebrew prophets saw and recorded both the immediate (historical) and future (Christological) significance of their prophecies, grounded the spiritual sense of Scripture squarely upon the literal sense. It also fixed the correlation between the biblical types and antitypes in the history of redemption. These "Antiochenes" contended that biblical meaning was clearly discernable, not hidden and mysterious as in Alexandria. On the dangers of exaggerating the differences between these two, ancient schools of thought and claiming the school of Antioch as a precursor to modern efforts in historical exegesis, see especially Frances M. Young, "The Rhetorical Schools and Their Influence on Patristic Exegesis," in *The Making of Orthodoxy: Essays in Honour of Henry Chadwick*, ed. Rowan

Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 182-99; Bradley Nassif, “‘Spiritual Exegesis’ in the School of Antioch,” in *New Perspectives on Historical Theology: Essays in Memory of John Meyendorff*, ed. Bradley Nassif (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 343-77; Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture*, 165-66; John J. O’Keefe, “‘A Letter that Killeth’: Toward a Reassessment of Antiochene Exegesis, or Diodore, Theodore, and Theodoret on the Psalms,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 8 (Spring 2000): 83-104; and Donald Fairbairn, “Patristic Exegesis and Theology: The Cart and the Horse,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 69 (Spring 2007): 1-19.

⁴⁶ Most of the early church fathers made only a broad, generic distinction between the literal and the spiritual sense of Scripture, though some did propose up to seven different senses. John Cassian was the first to promote the fourfold exegesis that became the standard during the Middle Ages. In his *Conferences* (*Collationes*, written during the 420s), 14.8-11, he wrote that on top of the literal sense “there are three kinds of spiritual lore, namely, tropology, allegory, and anagoge. . . . History embraces the knowledge of things which are past and which are perceptible. . . . What follows is allegorical, because the things which actually happened are said to have prefigured another mystery. . . . Anagoge climbs up from spiritual mysteries to the higher and more august secrets of heaven Tropology is moral teaching designed for the amendment of life and for instruction in asceticism.” English translation from John Cassian, *Conferences*, trans. Colm Luibheid, *The Classics of Western Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 159-66.

⁴⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia. I, 10. Under Thomas’s weighty influence, the three spiritual senses were often said to correspond to the theological virtues: faith (allegorical), hope (anagogical), and love (tropological).

⁴⁸ *Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria,*

Moralis quid agas, quo tendas anagogia.

⁴⁹ For more on the history of medieval exegesis, see James Samuel Preus, *From Shadow to Promise: Old Testament Interpretation from Augustine to the Young Luther* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1969); G. R. Evans, *The Language and Logic of the Bible: The Earlier Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); G. R. Evans, *The Language and Logic of the Bible: The Road to Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Magne Saebø, ed., *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*, Vol. 1, *From the Beginnings to the Middle Ages* (until 1300), Part 2, *The Middle Ages* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000); Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson, eds., *A History of Biblical Interpretation*, vol. 2, *The Medieval through the Reformation Periods* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009); Henning Graf Reventlow, *History of Biblical Interpretation, Volume 2: From Late Antiquity to the End of the Middle Ages*, trans. James O. Duke, Resources for Biblical Study (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009); and Karlfried Froehlich, *Biblical Interpretation from the Church Fathers to the Reformation* (Farnham, U.K.: Ashgate, 2010).

⁵⁰ English translation from Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians, 1519, LW*, 27:311. For the original Latin, see *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1883-), hereafter WA, 2:550.

⁵¹ English translation from John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 135.

⁵² David C. Steinmetz, "Divided by a Common Past: The Reshaping of the Christian Exegetical Tradition in the Sixteenth Century," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 27 (Spring 1997): 249.

⁵³ R. A. Muller, “Biblical Interpretation in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,” in McKim, ed., *Dictionary of Major Biblical Interpreters*, 26.

⁵⁴ For more on these matters from the Steinmetz school, see Richard A. Muller, “The Hermeneutic of Promise and Fulfillment in Calvin’s Exegesis of the Old Testament Prophecies of the Kingdom,” in *The Bible in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. David C. Steinmetz, Duke Monographs in Medieval and Renaissance Studies (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 68-82; several of the essays in Richard A. Muller and John L. Thompson, eds., *Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation: Essays Presented to David C. Steinmetz in Honor of His Sixtieth Birthday* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996); Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2, 475; David C. Steinmetz, ed., *Die Patristik in der Bibelexegese des 16. Jahrhunderts*, Wolfenbütteler Forschungen (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1999); David C. Steinmetz, “John Calvin as an Interpreter of the Bible,” in *Calvin and the Bible*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 285; and G. Sujin Pak, *The Judaizing Calvin: Sixteenth-Century Debates over the Messianic Psalms*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), who distinguishes Calvin from Luther (and other early modern Lutherans) as a more important precursor to more modern historical critics of the Bible.

⁵⁵ *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, 1.7.

⁵⁶ See Pelikan, *Luther the Expositor*, 112-13; David C. Steinmetz, *Luther and Staupitz: An Essay in the Intellectual Origins of the Protestant Reformation*, Duke Monographs in Medieval and Renaissance Studies (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1980), 35-67; Timothy J. Wengert, *Philip Melanchthon’s Annotationes in Johannem in Relation to Its Predecessors and Contemporaries*, Travaux d’humanisme et Renaissance (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1987), 72-73,

109-13; Robert Kolb, "Sixteenth-Century Lutheran Commentary on Genesis and the Genesis Commentary of Martin Luther," in *Théorie et pratique de l'exégèse: Actes du troisième colloque international sur l'histoire de l'exégèse biblique au XVI^e siècle . . .* (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1990), 243-58; Johann Anselm Steiger, "Martin Luthers allegorisch-figürliche Auslegung der Heiligen Schrift," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 110 (1999): 331-51; Mickey Leland Mattox, "Defender of the Most Holy Matriarchs": *Martin Luther's Interpretation of the Women of Genesis in the Ennarationes in Genesin, 1535-1545*, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Raymond A. Blacketer, *The School of God: Pedagogy and Rhetoric in Calvin's Interpretation of Deuteronomy*, Studies in Early Modern Religious Reforms (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), 224-28; and Mickey L. Mattox, "Luther, Martin," in Kevin J. Vanhoozer et al., ed., *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 471-73. As Brian Cummings writes in reference to early Protestantism, "Protestant literalism is nowhere near so literal as it wants to appear. If simple-minded adherents then and now wished for plain and simple meaning, language itself always got in the way. Once a figurative reading was subsumed as part of the act of interpretation demanded by the literal, the literal sense was encountered as already rich and complex." Brian Cummings, "Protestant Allegory," in *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory*, ed. Rita Copeland and Peter T. Struck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 185. See also Brian Cummings, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation: Grammar and Grace* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁵⁷ For more on Calvin's exegesis, see especially Alexandre Ganoczy and Stefan Scheld, *Die Hermeneutik Calvins: Geistesgeschichtliche Voraussetzungen und Grundzüge* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1983); Richard C. Gamble, "Brevitas et Facilitas: Toward an Understanding of Calvin's Hermeneutic," *Westminster Theological Journal* 47 (Spring 1985): 1-17; T. H. L.

Parker, *Calvin's Old Testament Commentaries* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986); Richard C. Gamble, "Calvin as Theologian and Exegete: Is There Anything New?," *Calvin Theological Journal* 23 (November 1988): 178-94; Thomas F. Torrance, *The Hermeneutics of John Calvin* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1988); John Lee Thompson, *John Calvin and the Daughters of Sarah: Women in Regular and Exceptional Roles in the Exegesis of Calvin, His Predecessors, and His Contemporaries*, Travaux d'Humanisme et Renaissance (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1992); T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, 2d ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1993); Peter Opitz, *Calvins theologische Hermeneutik* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1994); David L. Puckett, *John Calvin's Exegesis of the Old Testament*, Columbia Series in Reformed Theology (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995); Peter De Klerk, ed., *Calvin as Exegete: Papers and Responses Presented at the Ninth Colloquium on Calvin and Calvin Studies . . .* (Grand Rapids: Calvin Studies Society, 1995); Gary Neal Hansen, "John Calvin and the Non-Literal Interpretation of Scripture" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1998), which provides the most evidence that Calvin also interpreted Scripture allegorically (184-262); John L. Thompson, "Calvin's Exegetical Legacy: His Reception and Transmission of Text and Tradition," in *The Legacy of John Calvin: Calvin Studies Society Papers 1999*, ed. David L. Foxgrover (Grand Rapids: Calvin Studies Society, 2000), 31-56; Randall C. Zachman, "Gathering Meaning from the Context: Calvin's Exegetical Method," *Journal of Religion* 82 (January 2002): 1-26; Blacketer, *The School of God*; R. Ward Holder, *John Calvin and the Grounding of Interpretation: Calvin's First Commentaries*, Studies in the History of Christian Traditions (Leiden: Brill, 2006); McKim, ed., *Calvin and the Bible*; Richard Burnett, "John Calvin and the *Sensus Literalis*," Gary Neal Hansen, "John Calvin's Non-Literal Interpretation of Scripture: On Allegory," et al., in *John Calvin and the*

Interpretation of Scripture, Calvin Studies X and XI, ed. Charles Raynal (Grand Rapids: CRC Product Services, 2006), 331-42, 343-54, and passim; Barbara Pitkin, "John Calvin and the Interpretation of the Bible," in *A History of Biblical Interpretation, vol. 2, The Medieval through the Reformation Periods*, ed. Hauser and Watson, 341-71; and David C. Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context*, 2d ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁵⁸ Bernard, *The Faithfull Shepherd*, 53-54. (On Bernard's threefold method of interpreting the Bible, "By the Analogie of faith," "By the circumstance of the place," and "By comparing and laying Scripture to Scripture," see 28-29.) See also John Wilkins, *Ecclesiastes, Or, A Discourse Concerning the Gift of Preaching as It Falls under the Rules of Art*, 2d ed. (London: M. F. for Samuel Gellibrand, 1647), 9-10.

⁵⁹ On early Protestant exegesis that was closer in time to Edwards, see especially Stanley P. Feinberg, "Thomas Goodwin's Scriptural Hermeneutics and the Dissolution of Puritan Unity," *Journal of Religious History* 10 (June 1978): 32-49; Gerald T. Sheppard, "Between Reformation and Modern Commentary: The Perception of the Scope of Biblical Books," in William Perkins, *A Commentary on Galatians*, ed. Gerald T. Sheppard (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1989), xlviii-lxxvii; Richard A. Muller, *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 164-69 (on English dissenter Henry Ainsworth); Neele, *The Art of Living to God*, 133-57, who says "the Reformed orthodox, according to Mastricht, allow for a single and literal sense: that which the writer intended. However, he adds, that this single sense can be composite in the tropological, typical, and mystical" (150, referring to Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologica*, 1.2.47.35); Adina Miriam Yoffie, "Biblical Literalism and Scholarship in Protestant Northern Europe, 1630-1700" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2009), who says with Steinmetz and

Muller “that, because of the interdependence of each interpreter’s context and his understanding of the *sensus literalis*, there was not one literal sense; there were many” (iv); Torbjörn Johansson, Robert Kolb, and Johann Anselm Steiger, eds., *Hermeneutica Sacra: Studien zur Auslegung der Heiligen Schrift im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert*, *Historia Hermeneutica* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2010); and the studies of British Puritan and Anglo-American Protestant exegesis cited above.

⁶⁰ I offer more on the pastoral Edwards in *Jonathan Edwards and the Ministry of the Word*.

⁶¹ Stein, “Jonathan Edwards and the Cultures of Biblical Violence,” in *Jonathan Edwards at 300*, 56.

⁶² Brevard S. Childs, “The Sensus Literalis of Scripture: An Ancient and Modern Problem,” in *Beiträge zur Alttestamentlichen Theologie: Festschrift für Walther Zimmerlie zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Herbert Donner, Robert Hanhart, and Rudolf Smend (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977), 91-92. Of the many, similar statements of this exegetical problem, see especially John A. Coleman, “The Bible and Sociology,” *Sociology of Religion* 60 (Summer 1999): 143-44; Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “What Is Theological Interpretation of the Bible?,” in Vanhoozer et al., ed., *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, 19-25; and Francis Martin, “The Spiritual Sense (*Sensus Spiritualis*) of Sacred Scripture: Its Essential Insight,” in Francis Martin, *Sacred Scripture: The Disclosure of the Word* (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press of Ave Maria University, 2006), 249-75. For more on the value of the history of exegesis for contemporary study of the Bible, see John L. Thompson, *Reading the Bible with the Dead: What You Can Learn from the History of Exegesis That You Can’t Learn from Exegesis Alone* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).